

**James Madison to Professor Everett, November 26, 1823. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.**

**TO EDWARD EVERETT. MAD. MSS.**

Montpellier, Novr 26th, 1823.

Dr. Sir, —I recd. several weeks ago your favor of Ocr. 30, accompanied by the little Treatise on population analyzing & combating the Theory of Malthus, which Till within a few days I have been deprived of the pleasure of reading.<sup>1</sup> Its reasoning is well entitled to the commendation you bestow on its ingenuity which must at least contribute to a more accurate view of the subject; and on its style, which is characterized by the artless neatness always pleasing to the purest tastes. Be so obliging as to convey my debt of thanks to the Author, and to accept the share of them due to yourself.

<sup>1</sup> Alexander bill Everett's *New Ideas on Population, with Remarks on the Theories and Godwin of Malthus*. London and Boston, 1822. See Madison to Jefferson, *ante*, Vol. II., p. 246.

Notwithstanding the adverse aspects under which the two Authors present the question discussed, the one probably with an eye altogether to the case of Europe, the other chiefly to that of Ama, I should suppose that a thorough understanding of each other ought to narrow not a little the space which divides them.

The American admits the capacity of the prolific principle in the human race to exceed the sources of attainable food; as is exemplified by the occasions for colonization.

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And the European could not deny that as long as an increase of the hands and skill in procuring food should keep pace with the increase of mouths, the evils proceeding from a disproportion could not happen.

It may be presumed also that Mr. Malthus would not deny that political institutions and social habits, as good or bad, would have a degree of influence on the exertion & success of labour in procuring food: Whilst his opponent seems not unaware of the tendency of a scanty or precarious supply of it, to check the prolific principle by discouraging marriages, with a consequent increase of the moral evils of licentious intercourse among the unmarried, & to produce the physical evils of want & disease, with the moral evils engendered by the first.

An essential distinction between the U. S. and the more crowded parts of Europe lies in the greater number of early marriages here than there, proceeding from the greater facility of providing subsistence; this facility excluding a certain portion of the Physical evils of Society, as the marriages do a certain portion of the moral one. But

that the rate of increase in the population of the U. S. is influenced at the same time by their political & social condition is proved by the slower increase under the vicious institutions of Spanish America where Nature was not less bountiful. Nor can it be doubted that the actual population of Europe wd. be augmented by such reforms in the systems as would enlighten & animate the efforts to render the funds of subsistence more productive. We see everywhere in that quarter of the Globe, the people increasing in number as the ancient burdens & abuses have yielded to the progress of light & civilization.

The Theory of Mr. Godwin, if it deserves the name, is answered by the barefaced errors both of fact and of inference which meet the eye on every page.

Mr. Malthus has certainly shewn much ability in his illustrations & applications of the principle he assumes, however much he may have erred in some of his positions. But he has not all the merit of originality which has been allowed him. The principle was adverted

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to & reasoned upon, long before him, tho' with views & applications not the same with his. The principle is indeed inherent in all the organized beings on the Globe, as well of the animal as the vegetable classes; all & each of which when left to themselves, multiply till checked by the limited fund of their pabulum, or by the mortality generated by an excess of their numbers. A productive power beyond a mere continuance of the existing Stock was in all cases necessary to guard agst. the extinction which successive casualties would otherwise effect; and the checks to an indefinite multiplication in any case, were equally necessary to guard agst. too great a disturbance of the general symmetry & economy of nature. This is a speculation however, diverging too much from the object of a letter chiefly intended to offer the acknowledgments & thanks which I beg leave to repeat with assurances of my continued esteem and respect.